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**PONZI SCHEMER SENTENCED IN MANHATTAN FEDERAL COURT  
TO NINE YEARS IN PRISON FOR TARGETING MEMBERS  
OF FOUR WASHINGTON HEIGHTS AND BRONX CHURCHES**

PREET BHARARA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced that BRYANT ISMAIL RODRIGUEZ, a/k/a Bryant Rodriguez, a/k/a Rubin Rodriguez, a/k/a Salvador Rodriguez, a/k/a Robert Rodriguez, a/k/a Ishmael Rodriguez, was sentenced yesterday to nine years in prison for charges stemming from a Ponzi scheme that defrauded over 200 victims, most of whom were members of churches in Washington Heights and the Bronx, of more than \$2 million. RODRIGUEZ was sentenced in Manhattan federal court by U.S. District Judge NAOMI REICE BUCHWALD, who presided over a six-day jury trial at which RODRIGUEZ was found guilty of wire and mail fraud.

According to documents filed in this case in Manhattan federal court and the evidence presented at trial, including the testimony of victims of the Ponzi scheme:

Beginning in approximately mid-2007, RODRIGUEZ, a member of El Camino Church in the Washington Heights neighborhood of Manhattan, told members of that church, another church in Manhattan, and two churches in the Bronx, New York, that he was involved with an electronics distribution company named Communication and Electronics Group, Inc. ("C&E"). RODRIGUEZ represented that C&E purchased electronics merchandise from major consumer electronics manufacturers and sold it to a number of large consumer electronics retailers -- such as Costco, BJ's Warehouse Club, PC Richard & Son, Circuit City, and Target -- at markups of more than 300 percent.

RODRIGUEZ offered church members opportunities to invest in C&E, promising returns of between 30 to 40 percent every month, additional cash bonuses, and even the opportunity to purchase homes in the Dominican Republic and New York City with their investment earnings.

Several members invested and received initial purported returns on their investments, after which they, or friends and family of theirs, invested additional money with RODRIGUEZ. In truth and in fact, however, C&E did not have any contracts with the electronics retailers RODRIGUEZ named, and RODRIGUEZ did not make payments to investors in the amounts promised. In reality, C&E was a shell company created by RODRIGUEZ, which never sold a single item to any major retailer and never purchased from any electronics manufacturer. Instead, RODRIGUEZ purchased hundreds of thousands of dollars of electronics using his personal membership at a local BJ's Warehouse Club, and gave away, or resold at a discount, some of those items to church members in order to lull them into believing that C&E had legitimate connections with electronics manufacturers. RODRIGUEZ spent the money from investors on hotel stays, trips, car rentals, and other personal expenses. Together, over 200 people invested more than \$2 million in RODRIGUEZ's scheme.

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In addition to the term of imprisonment, Judge BUCHWALD also sentenced RODRIGUEZ to three years of supervised release, and ordered that he pay \$2 million in restitution.

During the sentencing proceeding, Judge BUCHWALD said RODRIGUEZ's offense "was a deliberate and sustained effort to harm those who could least afford to be ripped off." She also said that he "cloaked himself in the church and in Christianity and in so doing perverted religion" and noted that "society needs to be protected from [his] machinations."

Manhattan U.S. Attorney PREET BHARARA stated: "For years, Bryant Rodriguez preyed on the faith and trust of his fellow church members to enrich himself. Today's sentence marks the final chapter in his journey of fraud. We will continue, along with our partners at the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, to pursue Ponzi schemers and others who victimize others for personal gain."

Mr. BHARARA praised the work of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service in the investigation of this case. He also thanked BJ's Warehouse Club and the other electronics retailers for their cooperation with the investigation.

This prosecution is being handled by the Office's Complex Frauds Unit. Assistant U.S. Attorneys SARAH LAI and JOSEPH FACCIPONTI are in charge of the prosecution.

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